DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 580 CG 021 591

TITLE	Serving Youth at Risk: Profiles for Success.
INSTITUTION	North Carolina State Dept. of Public Instruction, Raleigh.
PUB DATE	Feb 89
NOTE	22p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - General (140)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Programs; *Educational Improvement; Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; *School Counseling; Secondary School Students
IDENTIFIERS	North Carolina

ABSTRACT

Nine North Carolina programs in dropout prevention and for students at risk are described in this booklet. The programs were chosen for their comprehensiveness, serving kindergarten through grade 12. Even though there has been no formal validation of the programs presented, they are ones which appear to be using new and innovative solutions to keep students in school. For each of the programs the demographics of the school and community are described; a description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk is provided; and outstanding program features and special projects as well as characteristics that make the program work are listed. A contact person's name, address, and telephone number are listed. These school systems are featured: Craven County; Davidson County; Granville County; Haywood County; Hickory City; High Point City; Jackson County; Pasquotank County; and Wake County. (ABL)

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INTRODUCTION

As school systems across the state implement programs to identify and serve at-risk youth, local personnel are interested in knowing what others are doing. While many systems have good programs, nine have been identified which illustrate comprehensive approaches, kindergarten through grade twelve. These programs are featured in this booklet. Although there has been no formal validation of the programs, they are ones which appear to be using new and innovative solutions to keep students in school.

Over recent years, the following elements have emerged as essential components in strong programs:

- High level of coordination,
- Community involvement,
- Career and personal counseling,
- Strong commitment throughout school system and community,
- Caring staff,
- Parental involvement,
- Comprehensive approach,
- Monitoring of attendance,
- Positive approach to discipline, and
- Public awareness.

Although implemented in different ways, all of the programs share these basic elements which distinguish their effort and contribute to their success. Beyond these elements, each program has its own unique nature designed to meet local needs. The descriptions in this booklet are brief but do give some idea of the scope of the programs. Dropout prevention coordinators in these systems will be able to provide more detailed information.

CRAVEN COUNTY

Demographics:

Craven County is a large county in eastern North Carolina which serves approximately 14,000 students in twenty schools in the system. The dropout rate has ranged from a high of 9.9% in 1981-82 to a low of 5.9% in 1986-87.

The area offers diverse employment opportunities. Military facilities offer many jobs as do the manufacturing of hand tools and plumbing fixtures, paper processing, health care, and construction. Employers in the area express a preference for employees who are capable of mastering higher, more technical levels of math. Their ultimate preference is for high school graduates with vocational experience.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

The dropout prevention program in Craven County addresses a number of factors which have a positive impact on at-risk students. The early identification process for grades K–12 includes a monthly accounting of the number of referrals, action taken, the results, and feedback to teachers and administrators. Itinerant counselors make appropriate home visits and serve as resource persons throughout the school and community. High-risk counselors are a part of the system-wide plan for guidance which operates on a preventive model. School-based committees monitor and follow up on the progress of at-risk youth.

Emphasis is also placed on staff development activities for all personnel. These activities promote positive attitudes and communication with the general public, parents, and community agencies/groups and focus on student attendance.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- Substance Abuse Education Program (D.A.R.E. in all fifth grades, TOGETHER curriculum in ninth grade health and physical education classes, Here's Looking At You, 2000 curriculum in grades K-6, Choosing For Yourself curriculum in grades K-8, substance abuse information in selected high school classes, and Substance Abuse Advisory Council);
- Early Prevention of School Failure program;
- Guidance services, K-12;
- Established policy on suicide;
- Tryout Work Experience Program;
- Extended School Day Program;
- Basic improvement plans related to vocational education;
- Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Task Force; and
- Parenting workshops at the elementary level.

What makes it "work"?

- Total commitment of the central office administration;
- Individualized program offerings as much as possible;
- Emphasis on caring for the needs of at-risk students and their parents;
- Caring, committed school personnel;
- Counselors for at-risk students integrated into system-wide guidance program;
- Early identification, intervention, and data collection;
- K-12 approach;
- Emphasis on positive school climate; and
- Parental involvement.

Whom to contact?

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DAVIDSON COUNTY

Demographics:

The Davidson County School System is located in Region 5 of the state of North Carolina and serves approximately 16,000 students. The system shows a gradual decline in the dropout rate, from 7.6% in 1978 to 6.5% in 1986. Davidson County has rapidly become a suburban county in its northern regions while remaining rural in the southern regions. The county is still considered predominantly rural although farming is no longer a major area of employment. Most of the population in Davidson County is employed in furniture-related or other light manufacturing industries. The past decade has shown an increase in diversified manufacturing and blue collar trade.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

The dropout prevention program in Davidson County is a comprehensive K-12 program which reflects a strong commitment from the superintendent, central office staff, administrators, teachers, and other school staff. A central office team coordinates system-wide services while school-based teams monitor the individual student's performance. A Student Management and Referral Team (S.M.A.R.T.) operates at each school and serves to facilitate the case management approach to serving at-risk students in grades K-12. Students are referred to S.M.A.R.T. based on a set of well-defined criteria. Each student referred is monitored frequently for progress, and appropriate intervention strategies are implemented.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- Alternative Parenting Program,
- Extended School Day Program,
- Homework Assistance Telephone Line (HAL),
- Support services,
- School social workers,
- Substance abuse prevention,
- Cooperative education program, and
- Vocational education/JTPA.

What makes it "work"?

- Comprehensive services;
- System-wide and school-level coordination;
- Home visits by school social workers;
- Commitment of superintendent, dropout prevention coordinator, administrators, and teachers;
- Competent, caring staff;
- Extended School Day Program;
- Internal awareness and marketing campaign;
- School coordinators for dropout prevention;

- Peer assistance program;
- Linkages with community agencies; and
- Team approach to serving at-risk students (case management).

Whom to contact?

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GRANVILLE COUNTY

Demographics:

Granville County can be described as a county in transition. For many years the county was primarily an agricultural one with the vast majority of employment opportunities centered around tobacco. In recent years, the growth of business and industry has resulted in numerous changes for the people of the county with employment opportunities changing to blue- and white-collar types of jobs. With this growth of business and industry, there has come a corresponding demand upon the school system to improve the dropout situation.

Other factors which both describe the county and highlight the need for dropout prevention include the following: (1) 18.7% of youth aged 16-19 are not high school graduates and are not enrolled in school. (2) The percent of adults aged 25 and older who are high school graduates is only 44.39. (3) The percent of all children under 18 who are below the poverty level is 19.93. Even though the dropout rate in the school system has decreased from 7.0% in 1983-84 to 5.5% in 1986-87, there are still over 100 youngsters dropping out of school each year.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

The superintendent with the endorsement of the board of education developed six critical objectives for the focus of the school system. One of these was dropout prevention. In addition, all central office staff, principals, and teachers developed their own objectives with dropout prevention being a high priority among all school personnel. This type of approach created a stable framework for the implementation of a broad-based dropout prevention program.

A full-time coordinator was hired to direct the total effort in the school system and was given responsibility for all existing programs related to dropout prevention. A comprehensive plan for dropout prevention was developed which provides direction for all those in the school and community who work with the program. A 34-member task force, representative of school and community, serves as a vehicle for accomplishing the goals and objectives stated in the plan. A 20-member committee composed of educators addresses instructional issues related to dropout prevention. Involving the community in dropout prevention efforts is a major component of the total approach in Granville County.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- Family Awareness Month,
- MOP (Meaningful Other Person),
- Student-Assistance Program,
- Job Placement Centers,
- Extended School Day Program,
- Parties: Guidelines for Parents (booklet),

- Suicide prevention manual,
- Teen help cards,
- Project INSERVICE,
- PALS (Provides Adult Loving Support),
- ALERT (dropout prevention newsletter),
- Staff development each year for all school personnel,
- POPS (Power of Positive Students),
- CERES (Career Exploration Responsive to Every Student),
- POP (Parent Opportunity Program),
- On-going media campaign,
- Peer counseling,
- Extended Time Learning Center,
- Alternative classrooms in middle schools,
- Home-school coordinators in every elementary school,
- On-going campaign against drugs highlighted by Drug Awareness Month,
- Academic remediation,
- Strong therapeutic element in in-school suspension programs, and
- Early identification/intervention system.

What makes it "work"?

- Endorsement of board of education;
- Superintendent's commitment and support;
- Full-time central office coordinator;
- K-12 "broad-brush" approach;
- Early identification, intervention, and monitoring;
- Community, business/industry, and parental involvement;
- Focus on effective schools and inviting school success;
- Dropout prevention coordinator in every school; and
- Continued efforts to increase awareness of problem in schools and community.

Whom to contact?

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HAYWOOD COUNTY

Demographics:

Haywood County is a school system comprised of approximately 8,000 students, located in Region 8 of North Carolina. A serious dropout problem currently exists in this LEA. The annual rate of 7-8% has resulted in some 30% of those students who enter ninth grade failing to graduate. Based upon local surveys and effort invested over the past four years, it appears that the problem is primarily characterized by low achievement in school, home factors which are generally beyond student control, low motivation, and poor school attendance. The most powerful determinants in student decisions to drop out of school, however, appear to be the lack of positive personal relationships and/or a goal beyond high school sufficiently strong enough to cause the student to persevere in spite of difficult circumstances.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

The superintendent, board of education, and other administrators strongly support dropout prevention as a major objective of the school system. A full-time coordinator works at the central office level to direct the total program. A three-year comprehensive plan was developed in 1985 outlining goals, objectives, and strategies for the program. A task force and educators' committee work to advise, generate ideas, and help implement the plan. Community, business and industry, and parental involvement are major program components.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- Volunteer program,
- HIT (Hang In There mentor program),
- Support team in each school,
- Extended School Day Program,
- Alternative classes,
- Attendance counselors,
- JTPA program,
- Project Pursuit,
- Home visitation program,
- In-school suspension with strong counseling component,
- Peer counseling,
- Academic remediation,
- Preschool kindergarten screening,
- Computerized early identification system,
- Yearly staff development,
- TESA training,
- On-going media campaign, and
- Contracted psychological services.

What makes it "work"?

- Commitment of board of education and administration;
- Community participation;
- Full-time central office coordinator;
- K-12 "broad-brush" approach;
- Early identification, intervention, and tracking;
- Focus on positive school climate; and
- Continued efforts to increase awareness of problem in school, home, and community.

Whom to contact?

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HICKORY CITY

Demographics:

The Hickory Public School System encompasses an urban-rural area of approximately 30 square miles in the northwestern section of Catawba County. A vital link between the Blue Ridge mountains and the Piedmont Foothills, Hickory has an elevation of 1,163 feet above sea level with a variety of terrain. The largest city in the county, Hickory, is the business, industrial, population, and cultural center of Catawba County.

The county's labor force has grown from 44,780 to over 57,000 in 1985. More than fifty-one percent of the laborers are employed in skill trades and other manual operations. Sixteen percent are employed in professional, administrative, and managerial positions. The remaining thirty-three percent are involved in clerical, sales, or service occupations. Hosiery, furniture, and textiles have dominated the manufacturing scene. Nearly seventy percent of the manufacturing work force is employed by these segments. In the area of hosiery, more socks are made in this area than anywhere else in the world. More than 145 hosiery manufacturers are located in this area.

The Hickory School System has 4,269 students, taught by 285 certified personnel. The system has five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. An alternative school serves Hickory, Newton-Conover, and Catawba County.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

The system-wide dropout prevention committee in Hickory City identified four goals for working with at-risk youth: to develop a system for early identification and intervention; to develop a system for collecting, organizing, and maintaining dropout data; to provide awareness and publicity of the dropout prevention program; and to provide a system of encouraging students to remain in school. To accomplish these goals, a variety of programs have been designed to deliver services to students in grades K-12. These services include vocational assessment, school psychological services, elementary counselors, a tutorial program, an alternate school, business and industry involvement, and the Early Prevention of School Failure program.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- "Staying in School is Essential,"
- Project Primetime Programs - Time for Information and Time for Follow-up,
- "I'm Special,"
- Ombudsman,
- Just Say No Clubs,
- "Early Watch,"
- D.A.R.E.,
- Quest,

- S.A.F.E.,
- The Hickory Alternate School Young Parents Program (comprehensive program for adolescent parents and their children), and
- Extended School Day Program.

What makes it "work"?

- Cooperative efforts of administrators, teachers, and support personnel;
- Dedicated, competent, committed staff K-12;
- Community commitment and involvement;
- Adult support for at-risk students;
- Comprehensive, coordinated approach;
- Early identification and intervention;
- Accurate data collection; and
- Increased awareness of the problem.

Whom to contact?

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HIGH POINT CITY

Demographics:

The High Point City Schools, located in the Piedmont area of the state, serves approximately 8,570 students who attend one of sixteen schools in the system. The dropout rate has ranged from a high of 9.6% in 1980-81 to a low of 6.3% in 1986-87.

With nearly one hundred furniture factories in the area, High Point is the "Furniture Capital of the World." The city is also among the nation's leading producers of hosiery and textile products. Furniture manufacturing is moving toward extensive use of computerized machinery, and entry-level jobs will soon require basic skills in language and math.

Between 1970 and 1980, employment in manufacturing declined while employment in professional and related services increased. During this same period, the percentage of children under age 18 in unmarried households increased 56%. In 1980, 48% of the population 25 years of age and older were not high school graduates. The median family income was $17,000. For 1984-85, 44% of the students qualified for free lunch.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

The dropout prevention program is a part of the Pupil Personnel Division. The program had its beginning with the superintendent, who included dropout prevention as a major goal for the school system. As a result, a local advisory council consisting of members of civic groups, social services and youth agencies, and the business community developed a three-year plan. The council meets periodically to assess the progress of the program.

The program is characterized by strong, cooperative approaches to serve at-risk students. Various components address remedial instruction, job skills training, parenting skills for teenaged mothers, industry-education coordination, teen pregnancy, after-school programs, and vocational assessment and training.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- Lessons on Control Theory for students;
- Coordination of all programs for at-risk youth;
- Active parenting component;
- Learning Style Instrument utilized to determine effective teaching strategies for students;
- Staff development component;
- CARES (a community effort to provide after-school activities for latch-key children);
- Project PAIN (Parents and Adolescents in Need);
- Drug Action Council;
- Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse/Neglect Team;

- Child Sexual Abuse Task Force; and
- Early intervention program in grades 4, 5, 6, and 9.

What makes it "work"?

- Low student-teacher ratio,
- Instruction at student's own level and pace,
- Open entry available when needed (Extended School Day),
- Administrative commitment to needs of high-risk youth,
- Systematic attendance procedures and incentives, and
- Assertive Discipline or other defined discipline procedures.

Whom to contact?

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JACKSON COUNTY

Demographics:

Jackson County is located in Region 8 in the southwestern part of North Carolina. It is a rural county which has experienced some industrial growth in recent years. The per capita income as reported in 1984 was $8,470. Based on a 1985-86 report from the Jackson County Task Force, the three greatest problems facing youth in the area are family conflict, out-of-school suspension, and dropping out of school. The most current dropout rate (1986-87) is 4.3%, which has declined gradually from an all-time high of 7.9% in 1978-79.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

The dropout prevention program in Jackson County is a comprehensive K-12 program. There is strong support for the program among school board members, administrators, teachers, and other school staff. The coordinator directs all dropout prevention efforts and the system-wide substance abuse program. Community, business and industry, and parents are involved in dropout prevention activities. A task force helps plan, advise, and implement all dropout prevention efforts.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- Counselors and teachers for identified at-risk students;
- Well-developed early identification and intervention system, including pre-kindergarten screening;
- Peer counseling;
- "Operation Graduation" program;
- On-going media campaign;
- Outdoor adventure camps for at-risk youth;
- Substance abuse awareness program;
- After-school program;
- Staff development opportunities for all school personnel;
- JTPA;
- Community volunteer program;
- Incentive program related to attendance and behavior;
- Advisor-advisee program;
- NOISOK (NO Is OK) program;
- Skills for Living program;
- Success cards;
- Home reports;
- Home visits;
- Dropout prevention newsletter; and
- School support teams.

What makes it "work"?

- Commitment of board of education, superintendent, central office staff, and school-level staffs;
- High level of awareness of the problem in schools and in the community;
- Coordinator who can give a large percentage of time to dropout prevention;
- On-going media campaign;
- Close working relationship with the community college;
- Expansion of the counseling program;
- Careful monitoring of at-risk students; and
- Emphasis on building positive school climates.

Whom to contact?

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PASQUOTANK COUNTY

Demographics:

The Pasquotank County School System, located in Region 1, is comprised of approximately 5,289 students. A review of the dropout rate shows 66 in 1984-85 (6.6%), 104 in 1985-86 (6.7%), and 94 in 1986-87 (6.4%). The rate is slightly below the state average and showed some decline for 1986-87. There has been a decrease in out-of-school suspensions from 340 in 1985-86 to 306 in 1986-87. In-school suspension totaled 1,349 days in 1986-87.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

The board of education and administration strongly support dropout prevention as a major focus for the school system. Although the dropout prevention coordinator has primary responsibilities for exceptional children, she has been able to devote a large amount of time to dropout prevention and to coordinate the two areas in a number of ways. The Pasquotank County Interagency Council has made dropout prevention one of its top priorities and serves in an advisory capacity in decision-making and implementation. A comprehensive three-year plan for dropout prevention is in place, and documentation of the implementation of the plan is an on-going process.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- Counseling program for identified at-risk students;
- Therapeutic elements in in-school suspension;
- Career development program;
- Early identification, intervention, and monitoring;
- Exit counseling;
- Well-developed dropout referral system;
- Alternative education program at junior high level;
- On-going staff development in areas of working with at-risk students and of adolescent development;
- JTPA entry employment;
- Community involvement;
- Home visits;
- Peer helpers program;
- Crisis intervention plan; and
- Cooperative agreement with the community college.

What makes it "work"?

- Commitment of superintendent and dropout prevention coordinator,
- Increased level of awareness of the problem,
- Interagency cooperation,

- Continuous monitoring of the early identification system,
- Follow-up activities for dropouts and potential dropouts,
- Focus on effective disciplinary practices,
- Parental concern and involvement, and
- Close working relationship with the community college.

Whom to contact?

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WAKE COUNTY

Demographics:

The Wake County Public School System, the second largest in the state, is a consolidated system that serves over 59,000 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade in 78 schools with 7,300 employees including 3,300 classroom teachers.

In 1986-87, approximately 1,200 students were recorded as dropouts. This number represents only .8% at the middle/ junior high level but rises to 6.2% of the total senior high student population. Statistics reveal an overall 4% decline in dropouts over the previous year and an 18% decline at the middle school level; this has been the first significant downward trend in a number of years.

Description of the program for dropout prevention and students at risk:

During the past three years, the model program has afforded the Wake County Public School System a unique opportunity to focus specifically on its potential dropout population, enhancing and expanding many effective programs already in place while sponsoring new initiatives to close the gaps in services for students at risk. Adhering to the essential elements in the program design -- a central office coordinator for dropout prevention, the involvement of key educators, and an interagency school and community advisory council -- a broad-based action plan was developed. The plan includes the following areas of emphasis:

- Research and dropout data collection,
- Media and public awareness of the dropout problem,
- Linkages with community resources, and
- A school-based Advancement Program for students at risk.

Outstanding features and special projects:

- Wake County Interagency Council for Youth;
- Advancement program in middle and high schools;
- Strong counseling component in in-school suspension;
- Staff development and educational programs for parents, teachers, and other youth-serving professionals;
- Teen help cards;
- ADVANCE (dropout prevention newsletter);
- "Dropping Out: Who Cares?"(slide/sound production);
- Three pilot projects on students at risk in collaboration with area universities;
- Comprehensive data based on all students who drop out;
- Focused interview research study to examine what students say about being at risk;

- Counseling program for gifted students identified as at risk;
- Extensive, on-going media campaign;
- Teen help-line; and
- Comprehensive referral manual for individuals assisting youth in school and community.

What makes it "work"?

- Full-time central office coordinator;
- Advisory council consisting of persons in key leadership positions in business, industry, community agencies, and universities;
- Early identification, intervention, and monitoring;
- K-12 "broad-brush" approach;
- Community partnerships;
- Research-based approach; and
- Emphasis on network of counselors.

Whom to contact?

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